

Lime Garden @ The Fleece, Bristol, 06/03/24

True to their name, Lime Garden has cultivated a growing following with their refreshing twist on the well-trodden ground of the indie genre and a not-so subtle edge of bitterness. Hailing from Brighton, the so-called 'wonk pop' quartet were included in NME's top 100 artists for 2022 and are currently embarking on an international tour following the release of their debut album, *One More Thing*. While the group's sound invites easy comparisons to fellow coastal breakouts Wet Leg or The Big Moon, there is something about Lime Garden that marks them out from the sea of new alternative hopefuls. Their infectiously catchy hooks, razor-sharp lyricism and impeccably clean instrumentals are coupled with a lively energy that is reciprocated by the audience, which in the words of frontwoman Chloe Howard, seems to get bigger at every show.



First up, though, is the group's support act My First Time, which unexpectedly places the somewhat languid crowd on the receiving end of what amounts to a musical slap in the face. From the start to the finish of their short set, the homegrown four-piece veers dangerously close to completely stealing the show, seizing the audience's attention with a high-energy wall of sound. At every instrumental break, vocalist Isaac Stroud-Allen stands stock-still and stares intensely into space while his bandmates shred their instruments around him, causing every spectator in his field of vision to feel both uncomfortably exposed and mesmerised in equal measure.

While many of their songs are conspicuously absent from streaming services, their recent release 'Wind Up Merchant' provides an explosive burst of energy. Clashing cymbals and electric guitars blare out while Stroud-Allen roars the acerbic chorus "I'll twist your arm, I'll pull your leg until you scream and shout." Members of the audience are left veering from what they just heard and eager for more, with murmurs of approval echoing around the room. The band is certainly a rising star in the Bristolian music scene.

The second support band, Ugly, in no way lives up to their name. The genre-bending group from Cambridge gives a more laid-back, yet undeniably compelling, performance than their predecessor, with much of the setlist made up of new material. Combining an eclectic fusion of country, rock and choral, constantly defying the listener's expectations with discordant tonal shifts and the sudden inclusion of different languages, the six members seemingly become lost in their own worlds, following their own melodic paths yet somehow winding back together into a powerful crescendo.

Although certain songs induce a slight ebb in attention, the group's idiosyncratic sound is undoubtedly a breath of fresh air and has gone through a substantial sonic evolution from its garage rock roots (interestingly, their former drummer Charlie Wayne is now of Black Country, New Road fame). At one point, frontwoman Jasmine Miller-Sauchella shouts out a group of young men in the front row who have travelled from Cardiff to see them, each of whom react as if they have been graced by the hand of God. Highlights include 'Shepherd's Carol' and a haunting unreleased song, in which the lyrics 'straight to the wasteland / we're miles and miles away' reverberate with stunning harmonisation.

The main act starts off somewhat slowly with the at times repetitive 'Sick & Tired' and 'Marbles' before launching into 'Mother', a stand-out single from their new release. Beginning with a funky bassline and shimmering synth, the song reaches its peak with the soaring, mournful refrain "how I wish I could take back my words / of pain and of hurt." Howard's lilting vocals evoke the relatable uncertainty and confusion that comes with being an early twenty-something in the melancholy 'Pine', which is neatly followed by 'Fears', an achingly vulnerable song that explores the pressures of both prospective stardom and obscurity. This subject matter seems presciently on-the-nose for a band teetering on the precipice of breakout prominence.



'Nepotism (baby)', the inspiration for which Howard describes as "wanting to be Kate Moss' daughter," is an instant earworm, while 'Love Song' and 'I Want to Be You' are both solid highlights from the album's impressive track listing. The audience favourite was Clockwork, which the band performs with irresistible energy and flamboyant zeal. Due to a synth mishap, the group is only able to play one final song during the encore, to the disappointment of the expectant crowd.

Of the band's setlist, their pickings from *One More Thing* seem to be the tracks that translate best to a live setting. Remarkably polished, punchy and vibrant, the band pumps out hit after hit in a treasure trove that should be spinning on the turntable of every indie enthusiast. If their debut is anything to go by, the band can expect a fruitful future.